

Bill: HB 2717 – Oppose
To: Sen. Robert Olson
Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee
Type: Virtual
DT: 3/29/22

FR: Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County
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Senator Olson and Members of the Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs:

My name is Connie Brown Collins and I am writing as an engaged citizen of Wyandotte County Kansas City, KS.

The United States of America was built by immigrants, imported laborers and slaves. Today, the state of Kansas relies heavily on immigrants. Kansas has used immigrants in the farm fields since the late 1800's. Following settlements by explorers and Native American Indians, (who by the way, were immigrants), Wyandotte county was also built by immigrants. If we are to protect the integrity of our county, our state and our country, we must protect our immigrants. HB 2717 works against that principle.

I oppose HB 2717 on the following grounds:

- Municipalities know what is best for their cities and counties, including the Wyandotte County Mayor Garner and Unified Government Commissioners. Topeka elected representatives should follow their lead.
- Workers need to feel safe in this environment of worker shortages. SB 2717 will send needed workers to other states where they don't feel threatened. Many immigrant families have combination status, one member might be an immigrant, but the others could be citizens. The consequences of this bill could tear hard-working families apart or force them to seek a less intimidating residential setting.
- Contrary to some opinions, this bill does not ban cooperation with federal immigration authorities if public safety is at risk. It sets parameters as to the level that local authorities can cooperate with federal agencies, such as ICE, but it does not bar that cooperation.
- Citizen trust in law enforcement is key to public safety. If immigrants (whether legal or not) think they will be arrested and deported, or their information will be shared with ICE, they will be too frightened and intimidated to report crimes. This can create a potential crime increase and promote further distrust and lack of cooperation with local law enforcement and the court systems. The dilemma can lead to increased risk from crime for all residents. In Wyandotte County, District Attorney Mark Dupree

endorsed the Safe and Welcoming ordinance, and neither Police Chief Carl Oakman nor Sheriff Daniel Soptic opposed the ordinance.

- The Municipal ID portion of the Safe and Welcoming Ordinance has built-in protections from fraud with accompanying penalties. The Wyandotte County ID is labeled Municipal, and does not include or allude to a State ID designation.
- An example of the need for the ID card applies to my husband, who was born in Georgia and did not have a birth certificate. Many older individuals in the segregated south were born in homes. Even with “separate but equal” hospital births, records were often sketchy. It took months of filling out forms and sending them back and forth for my husband to get a cursory record of his birth. The ID card might have eliminated the trials my husband endured. However, not being able to use it at the polls would have created an extreme hardship since my husband was an ardent voter.
- Because the federal government has not passed immigration reform, states and local governments are tasked with developing their own economies and systems which include and protect immigrants, who now live without legal redress to their status. Policies need to be developed with communities in mind and not with state overreach. More pressure should be exerted on Congress to enact immigration reform legislation, rather than by inaction, promoting state over-extension into cities who seek to provide adequate safeguards for their diverse communities.

Please oppose HB 2717. It has major flaws and does not represent the needs of Wyandotte County’s majority minority.

Thank you for your time, consideration and attention to this most critical issue.

Sincerely,

Connie Brown Collins
Voter Rights Network of Wyandotte County